

The Crimson Spark

by Green Priestess

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Summary: In which Fem!Soma goes to Tootsuki. Despite her provocative stage message with a slight twist, she didn't gain haters unlike her male counterpart in another universe. Rather, she stirred up blood the Academy never thought would boil until she came along.

1. Chapter 1

The Transfer Student

This happened, after the Director gave his rather blunt speech about gems and stepping stones.

'Eeh, to finish this opening ceremony, we'll introduce the new transfer student who passed the Admission Exam.' said the Ceremony Facilitator as out came a girl with bright red hair and amber eyes, walking with great confidence with a rather friendly smile. She's pretty tall for her age, slender and well-endowed.

For the students, its no news that the Entrance Exam Administrator is Nakiri Erina herself. For this girl to pass the blonde's standards, it means she's one hell of a cook.

'Uwaaaa...your Director sure is a scary person...come to think of it he's now my director too since I'm now a student here, ahahaha...' she said sheepishly with a cutesy pose while she earned a deadpan look from her peers before she too, went serious and showed how serious she is. 'Lessee, I'll be blunt myself. The real world is scary since I was at the front lines in my dad's kitchen. As long as you're a chef for your restaurant, you carry your restaurant's name and weight on your shoulders. In this industry, our customer's palettes are our Kings and Queens and its our duty to satisfy those very palettes! I have known that since I was a first grader and by then I was a kitchen hand, helping with ingredients...and by Grade 4, I was already a chef and my dad chucks me to the front lines mercilessly to show my mettle. Imagine your parent in my father's place and yourself in my shoes.'

'Pressure is upon you the minute you begin cooking for a customer. As a chef, we cannot fail the expectations of our customers. It takes one complaint, one bad word, and it'll become one heck of a downward spiral to the destruction of your reputation as a chef and the destruction of your restaurant's name. A Food Critic's word alone is an instant Death Sentence to our career. Our version of a _Shinigami_! Especially as you can't tell who among your clientele is a hidden critic whose word will make it to the papers and magazines! _Kindly picture that scenario in your heads_!' she grinned darkly as she can see the effects of those words to her listeners who were listening as if they're listening to a dictator's idea of a martial law. 'And its as scary as it sounds but that's the real world for us when we graduate so my question is, are you willing to face that real world as I have? It would not matter what kind of restaurant you came from as long as you're a Chef. All customers in the end are the same! So are you willing to be in the front after all that or not? If not, the gates are wide open!~' she said cheerfully. 'You can go home. Those unwilling to go to the real world to defend one's name and honor as chefs can be our stepping stones instead. So what will you be? Its up to you.' and she left the stage with a playful skip in her steps back to the tent.

'Phew, I said all that and the world's scariest critic is sitting right over here~' Yukihiro Sono while glancing at Nakiri Erina who raised an eyebrow at her deadpanned sigh. 'Tough luck for the real world I guess.'

'That's rich from someone from a local eatery.' said Erina wryly. 'I had your background researched yesterday.' She wondered who's the new student who managed to satisfy her when most chefs older than them failed and she was shocked the girl came from a cheap eatery.

'Fufu...everyone starts off that way until they become a classy restaurant. Just think of an eatery as a seed sproutling and a classy restaurant a fully-grown plant or tree with either flower or fruit. But in the end, the battlefield is still the same. 99.9 of the first years never experienced the horrors of a real kitchen so I guess hundreds of us will be gone before sophomore year.' she said airily. 'By the way, where's the school building?~and no, I didn't get a map because apparently, the school admin expected you won't pass anybody trying to transfer in so they didn't bother printing some!' she whined, causing the blonde to twitch in exasperation. 'Irresponsibly mean neh?'

Her words spread like wildfire and reached hundreds of ears.

And in first day at class...her classmates, are dead serious...as she is paired with a nervous wreck of a girl on her first class.

2. The Transfer Student's Steps

The Transfer Student's Steps

She got famous not just for her provocative words on her first day, its also very easy to spot her a mile away. Her thick, bright red hair went past her hips. Not only that, she wears a yellow knitted jumper that matched the color of the school skirt under her uniform blazer...which she doesn't wear as much as possible. Her socks are

white, loose and bunching. Other than her hair, her personality is also playful but there's little she shows of most of her personality...that only her dormmates know.

However, her grades are all an A no matter what class she's in.

As for her dormmates...

They know a lot of her.

They find her too optimistic and positive, and due to being in 'the front', she could keep her cool and her head effortlessly. And her cooking is effectively 'Fusion Free-Style' as while Isshiki recognized the techniques she used AND what country of origin, she herself did not know that and she said her father taught her those techniques _without_ telling her the name and origin of said technique(forcing her to crack books asap)...much to their collective disbeliefs that she knows and at the same time, does not know. And with the techniques she knows, she cooks Food For the Masses with a Twist as its her family shop's schtick. She even knew techniques Isshiki did not study as an Elite Ten due to lack of info or did not exist in resources the Elite Ten are privy to because her father apparently, got around so much in his travels that she taught them her 'ghost techniques'.

One nagging phone call later, they all finally found out they were ancient cooking techniques almost lost forever or unknown to the modern world but some traditionalists did their best to preserve what they could, and the lost arts were brought back after one heck of a detective work by her father and these challenges are why her father loved traveling so much. So now all of Polar Star was privy to 'Lost Arts' as Isshiki called it.

When there are times she's clueless, she looks darn cute.

Megumi is just glad she's her permanent class partner as somehow, being paired up with her saved her from expulsion many times over...and she was nice enough to give her advice when Sono can clearly see her struggles, but pressure and reputation as a no-good made Sono take drastic steps...before her Shokugeki with one Mito Ikumi because she did not appreciate that Nakiri has flunkies targeting RS she deemed inferior just so she could increase her cooking laboratories, and the Don RS are also part of the Food of the Masses criteria. They practically arranged a match.

'Megu-chan, how about you cook for all of us here for one whole day, and you put your utter best in it and spare no expense?' Sono suggested. 'I want to see your full abilities if you weren't in nervous-wreck mode. This dorm is a full buncha friendlies you've known for years so you don't get to freak out! If you are able to show your full abilities before friendlies and we get to judge you properly in a positive light, maybe that abysmal confidence of yours might level up.' she suggested over dinner. 'What made your confidence so terrible anyway? I've seen more confident Mimosa plants than you.' she said as a comical arrow stabbed her class partner.

'Blunt!' Yoshino Yuuki gasped out, feeling sorry for Megumi.

'How about that, Tadokoro-chan?' Isshiki asked Megumi. 'I like the

idea for your own good.' Everyone looked at Megumi who gulped.

'W-well...i-its just that...I don't do well under pressure...I often get an E because everyone looks at me...' Megumi fretted.

'Explain the behavior of your class for three years.' Sono asked Megumi.

Apparently, she's a country girl from Tohoku and that made her a bully target. Even worse as most of her classmates have families who own wealthy chain restaurants while she came from a Local Ryokan. Since violence is not allowed...they got something worse. Pressure. Pressuring her into screwing up and getting expelled.

'Well, they got that kinda pride.' Yuki sighed. 'They felt that being heirs of their restaurants, they can't allow those who see as their inferior to show them up. Its how this place works if you're not careful. People can be that dirty.'

'Yeah. One of the kids in my class quit to tears.' Sakaki Ryoko told them. 'Those from supplier shops like myself and Yuki-chan are off the hook because our shops supply chefs after all and it won't do if they make enemies out of suppliers.'

'Heh, Nakiri has no problems with me and I came from a Special-of-the-Day Eatery while passing her entrance exam.' Sono deadpanned. 'That's worse than a Ryokan but in the end, what matters is your skill as a chef and results. Backgrounds don't matter. What matters is ability and creativity to win the battle. Cook for us tomorrow and then ignore the snobs and show em' what you got. There's a good reason why foreign tourists like Ryokan more than city restaurants you know!'

'Try that out.' Isshiki greatly approves, apparently. 'If you're able to show what you really can do, we can determine your level.'

'O-OK! I'll cook dinner tomorrow!' Megumi gasped out in shy, nervous determination.

'Great! We got lots of stuff in the dorm for you to use!' Fumio grinned. 'We can't wait for tomorrow!'

'But Fumio-san, who'll be the judges?' Marui asked her but its Sono who answered.

'Three unbiased judges. Isshiki-senpai, Fumio-san and myself.' said Sono. 'You guys have a lot of History with Megu-chan so any of you is out of the running. Isshiki-senpai also has a history with her but as an Elite Ten, he must deliver impartial judgment. Then there's the dorm manager who tested all of us. That's three judges now. And its up to Megu-chan to shine. Remember what I said in the Opening Ceremony. If you think your middle school classmates are bad, the people tasting your cooking will be ten times worse.'

'Yeah, you did say chefs carry their restaurant's name and reputation on their shoulders.' said Ibusaki. 'You'd know how that feels best out of us.' its also no news that Food Critics are synonymous to Career Shinigamis for chefs if they screw up so the coined term caught on pretty quick.

'My father's merciless.' said Sono sheepishly.

'Your father eh? What kind of guy is he if he knew so many international and lost techniques one can't expect from your shop?' Fumio asked her.

'He does everything he wants on a whim and once he decides something, his mind is made up and there's no changing it. He even chucked me here and closed our shop even though I was fine with looking after our shop while he went out.' said Sono. 'He's also very creative and innovative that he could create his own menus out of any genre while still sticking to our shop's schtick. He has the ability to open a five star but he says its a pain in the ass since he's a free spirit and running a five star place will chain him down. The idiot is in Manhattan working under a contract for the CEO of XXXX Enterprises who's a big fan of his...come to think of it a scandal occurred there.'

'Scandal?' everyone croaked out.

'Yeah. He's been around to lots of places. Even fluent in many languages that he's even been to a monastery in China...the Head Priest chased him down to manhattan just to have his food again and went as far as stripping in a hall room full of high-ranking executives while swearing off his religion as long as he has father's food again. The old guy got arrested obviously.' she said, showing them an article on her smartphone's internet regarding the incident. But its in English...

'Uweee...' Aoki shuddered as he looked at the article. 'I need brain bleach now.'

'I don't understand English worth a damn but pictures alone talks a lot.' Shoji agreed.

But only two people recognized the man's face.

"With this guy as her father, no wonder!" they thought as they looked at the smiling redhead.

'Sono-chan, what school did your dad come from?' Isshiki asked with a smile but there's a glint in his eyes.

'No idea.' Sono deadpanned as Isshiki and Fumio looked rather put-out. 'He said he's been wandering around, picking stuff up as he went. He even told me life is a better teacher than any school so he quit before he can even graduate and he never told me what school he went to...normally I feel the same but pressure on girls in completing their schooling is stricter than on boys so I can't quit and just go to a normal school even if I want to.' she said airily, causing her dormmates to sweatdrop.

'Er, Sono-chan, just by being enrolled in Tootsuki alone increases your value as a chef. But quitting drastically decreases your value.' Sakaki pointed out. 'If people find that out, life outside will get harder because Tootsuki's name is extremely heavy! Heavyweight!' she choked out. 'Its name is heavier than all restaurants in the world combined! So quitting is a big no-no in this school!' she scolded.

'Heee...he didn't tell me what this school is about other than a chef's school.'

"Figures!" Fumio thought, annoyed.

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The next day...Shokugeki Day...

While Mito Ikumi brought out a luxury item, Sono baffled the spoiled masses with the cheap ingredients(even with labels 20% and half-offs) on containers with a cheerful smile. She even brought simple bowls!

'A-ARE YOU KIDDING MEEE?!' came the wail that shook the dome.

'You may as well get packing!' Ikumi burst out her sneer.

'Au contraire, Nikumi-chan~' Sono sassed the blonde playfully. 'You'll understand later...so no, I'm not gonna go packing. Oh, by the way, I'll make a sixth bowl just for you just for one special lesson to sink in.'

'Hah, as if it'll be any good.' the meat specialist scoffed as the two chefs began cooking. Once the time limit is over with Sono being the first to finish...

'That fast?!'

'Here you go!' said Sono cheerfully. She presented five covered bowls and took off the covers that released a very sensual aroma. However, its a Chaliapin Steak Don!

'Oy oy, you cooked it in just twenty minutes.' TV Program 'First Class Gluttons' producer Okamoto gasped out. 'Are you sure its even thoroughly cooked?'

'And its a Chaliapin Steak Don.' Japanese Black Critic Bitou deadpanned boredly after they got over the smell. 'At least it looks a bit nicer than it normally does.'

'It is~ why not find out with a bite?' Sono smirked. 'And you'll see why it should be called a Don. Remember these tastes before you rose to your current standing. Tastes you've long forgotten!' she said confidently as the two male judges exchanged looks.

'Well, since it smells so good it should probably taste good.' said Traditional Japanese Restaurant President Kuraki with a blush at the smells entering her nose. And when they took a bite...

'M-my hands won't stop!' Bitou cried as they madly started shoving food down their throats after the first bite that created an impact. 'This...this cheap on-sale meat is ridiculously tender! Not only that, these finely-chopped onions placed over it stimulate the appetite!' he exclaimed, wide-eyed.

'Wha?!'

'This body...its red wine!' Bitou continued. 'She put red wine in the

pan where she fried the steak so that the juices remain concentrated and he used those juices to fry the onions...'

'In addition she used potato starch dissolved in water to give it thickness!' Okamoto exclaimed. 'I can't get enough of the way that thick sauce entangles and entwines with the meat and rice! And she made it so fluffy!'

'And yet the flavor is well-arranged by the parched soy sauce! She used the burnt rice to give it a deeper flavor! She modified the method of cooking the onions that are indispensable for Chaliapin Steaks to create a special sauce!' Kuraki gasped out in a swoon.

'Moreover even though both the meat and the sauce have a defined taste, the more I eat the hungrier I get...why is it that I feel I can eat it forever?' Bitou croaked out while picking apart the remains of his dish. 'There must be a hidden secret somewhere!'

'Oh, its something just as cheap~' Sono took out a jar of red-something. 'Umefuushi-meshi.'

'I see! That refreshing aftertaste is plums!' and before they know it, they were asking her for seconds!

'Oh, the seconds are right over here...assuming she's done, that is.' said Sono, glancing at Ikumi. 'Oy~you done now?'

'Of course I'm done!' Ikumi sputtered out while laying down her own donburi in a classy ceramic bowl with artistically-arranged, flower-shaped meat don. 'And you dare call my A5 meats second-options?!' she cried angrily.

'Fufu, you'll understand later.' came Sono's mysterious smile.

'Ohhh! After that stimulating don, we get to sink our teeth into A5 meat!' Okamoto exclaimed in delight. 'I really should attend Shokugekis more!'

'We get to go home with high-grade aftertastes today, we're quite lucky!' Bitou exclaimed.

'This is my A5 Japanese Roti Beef Don.' said Ikumi confidently. 'Please enjoy!'

'Ooh! The carved meat is arranged like a flower!' Kuraki exclaimed appreciatively. 'To think I get to see such a beautiful don!' and they began eating. 'Its so delicious I can't stand!'

'This is it...the deep deliciousness of this A5 Meat!' Bitou exclaimed. 'Moreover the fire's angle was calculated! She put the flames in perpendicular to the fibers' orientation...by doing that, the heat enters uniformly and the juice starts flowing actively. A first-class master reads how even the fibers are!'

'And below the flower petals there's a superb garlic rice that was fried with beef tallow and butter! I could eat three bowls of this garlic rice in one go! Its an unbelievable dish that was finished almost sexily!'

'Hmph, how's that, transfer student?' Ikumi jeered at her opponent who was still smiling in a rather expectant way. Confidence not faltering one bit that infuriated her. 'How can you smile when my victory is almost certain?!'

'Heee? You sure about that?' Sono drawled, still smiling. 'Then compare the consumed bowls.' she stated as while her bowls are empty, the only things eaten by the judges were the beef and barely any rice. Ikumi also looked and gaped.

'Wha? They didn't finish everything?!'

'Okamoto-san claims that he could finish three bowls of garlic rice yet he didn't...in fact, all Shokugeki judges can be capable of eating food for more than five people due to competitions which I find really weird. I really wonder.' she said in a thinking pose while still smiling. 'You're thinking what happened to the rice, right? Yep, I admit garlic rice is really good I can even eat four bowls...but that's if its made right.'

'What do you mean made right?!' Ikumi growled.

'Your Donburi is not balanced. In utter disharmony.' Sono grinned. 'Luxury and cheap clashed ferociously when a Donburi Dish is supposed to be balanced and in harmony and more importantly...cheap. I should tell you what I said to Konishi-san and my cute understudy.'

Flashback...

_ 'Y-Yukihira...are you sure about this?' the Don RS chief, Konishi Kanichi worriedly._

_ 'Ohhh don't you worry~' Sono chirped. 'I got this down pat, you know~ besides, you said she's using cured A5 Beef, right? '_

_ 'Yes?!' Konishi yelped, panicking because of what he sees as a superweapon be put in a Shokugeki._

_ 'She's completely missing a crucial point of a Don Dish.' Sono smirked as she went with her groceries to the Shokugeki Dome with him and her 'protegee'. 'A Don Dish is supposed to be cheap and affordable while being in delicious balance and harmony, and filling at the same time! This dish is popular among employees at the bottom of the company food chain while under tight purse laces because its cheap, easy and fast to make, and easily accessible because a lot of Donburi shops are often five to ten minutes away from their workplaces! Salarymen in companies would drop dead from stress without Donburi Dishes! If she uses A5 Meat, that would skyrocket the prices and Japanese Salarymen and Office Ladies who are often forced to do overtime would weep in despair y'know! By saying she uses A5 Grade Beef, she completely missed the point even if she'll make a tasty dish...and I predict that...she'll also fail another concept once the judges get over her luxury beef's deliciousness.' _

_ 'A-another concept?' Megumi gasped out._

_ 'The toppings must balance and be in harmony to the point that even

the rice becomes a luxury. That's another thing she probably doesn't know.' Sono told her. 'This will be her last mistake. Those two mistakes will ensure that while delicious, they can't finish it all...while a true Donburi Dish is eaten down to the last grain of rice if only possible due to Japanese Dining Manners***** because of that very harmony and balance.' she explained. 'That is the culture of a Donburi Dish.' Sono smirked. _

_ 'W-wow...so you can make something so cheap taste just as luxuriously?' Konishi choked out, wheezing as he carried the heavier loads, considering someone NOT a member of his club is fighting to save his club, its the least he could do._

_ 'As a Food of the Masses Specialist, I guarantee that!' Sono grinned. 'Donburi falls along my schtick you know. Without Donburi or Ramen, yet another cheap accessible food, company employees cannot function well, causing a horrible chain reaction going upwards in a company's employee performances.' _

_ 'Oh...' _

End Flashback

And so...

'And that is why...you lose.' and Sono gave her the sixth bowl. 'Or if you still refuse to accept, why not try it out?'

Indeed, the judges voted in favor of her. Hands down.

xxx

'That's your first Shokugeki...amazing, Sono-san!' Megumi exclaimed.

'Thanks to you the Don RS is saved!' Konishi was in tears. 'How can I ever thank you?!!'

'I suppose you can start by taking lessons to heart and rebuild your RS. Maybe next time with more confident members.' Sono chuckled. 'Donburi is a Japanese Cultural Trademark. Foreigners even recognize Donburi as 'Japan' upon hearing that one word alone.'

'Why don't you join? Maybe that'll instill confidence!'

'Maybe as the leader you should up your own confidence first.' said Sono wryly. 'Moreover I'm a free spirit. I don't wanna stay in one place for too long.'

* * *

><p>1: In Japanese Dining Etiquette, while normally in western places its appreciated to eat everything down to the last scrap, in Japan its rude to the host, conveying a message that the host 'didn't feed their guests enough'. If you're at home, its OK and you can ask your mom for seconds.<p>

End
file.